

DEFINING A SIKH

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Since I wrote the need of 'Defining a Sikh' in 1992 and thereafter, I have not come across any serious effort by any Sikh institute, Sikh clergy, or Sikh authority to define a Sikh. Now all of a sudden a new definition of a Sikh is being coined in haste under the pretension to meet the requirement of forthcoming election of the SGPC. A Sikh defined in haste will have a lot of implications that will affect the whole Sikh nation especially those Sikhs living in the foreign countries.

COINING A DEFINITION

Before coining a definition one must understand the meanings of 'term' and 'definition'.

Term:

1. a word or expression that has a precise meaning in some uses or is peculiar to a science, art, profession, or subject.
2. any word or phrase used in a definite or precise sense.
3. [pl.] words that express ideas in a specified form.

Define:

1. to determine or identify the essential qualities or meanings of something.
2. to make distinct, clear, or detailed in outline.
3. to make a definition.

Definition:

1. a statement expressing the essential nature of something

The word 'SIKH' is a term, which should be defined according to the explanation given for a 'term', 'define', and 'definition' as above. The definitions of a SIKH given so far in various literary sources on Sikhism do not meet these criteria.

DEFINITIONS ALREADY ACCEPTED

Let us now discuss some definitions of a Sikh already accepted by the Sikh clergy and Sikh authorities and deficiencies and redundancies therein:

1. A Sikh in the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 [6]

(Part I, Chapter 1, Section 1)

(9) **Sikh** - "*Sikh*" means a person who professes the Sikh religion or, in the case of a deceased person, who professed the Sikh religion or was known to be Sikh during his lifetime.

If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in such manner as to the [State]¹ government may prescribe the following declaration:

"I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion."

²(10) "**Amritdhari Sikh**" means and includes every person who has taken *Khande-ka-amrit* or *Khanda de pahul* prepared and administered according to the tenets of Sikh religion and rites at the hands of five *pyaras* or beloved ones".

³(10-A) "**Sehjdhari Sikh**" means a person -

- (i) who performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites;
- (ii) who does not use tobacco or *kutha* (Halal meat) in any form;
- (iii) who is not a *Patit*; and
- (iv) who can recite *Mul Manter*.

⁴[(11) "**Patit**" means a person who being a *Keshadhari* Sikh trims or shaves his beard or *keshas* or who after taking *amrit* commits any or more of the four *kurahits*.]

1. Substituted for the word "Provincial" by the Adaptation of Laws Order 1950.
2. Inserted by Punjab Act XI of 1944 section 2 (b).
3. Inserted by Punjab Act No. 1 of 1959 section 3 (4).
4. Inserted by Punjab Act No XI of 1944, section 2 (b).

Comments

The above definitions lack consistency and precision. For example,

- "*Sikh religion*" has not been defined/explained. It raises a question. What is a Sikh religion?
- "*Believes in Guru Granth Sahib*" means idol worship. It should have been "follows the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib."
- In the definition of "*Amritdhari*" a word "person" is used for whom that has taken *Khande da Amrit*. There is no mention whether that "person" is a Sikh or non-Sikh.
- "*Sahjdhari Sikh*" has been defined as a person who only performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites and can only recite *Mool Manter*. It means he does not have to follow the Gurus' philosophy incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth sahib. Recitation of *Mool Manter* only, means believing in mantra-system that is contrary to the Guru's philosophy. In fact, there is no indication of or definition of a **Sehjdhari Sikh in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib**. However, the word "*sehj*" has been used extensively and that means "tranquillity" and also as "slowly". It is recommended to everybody (Sikh) in the *Gurbani* to attain this stage of "*sehj*" by understanding and practicing the teachings imparted in the *Gurbani*.
- The word "*Patit*" used in clauses 10-A (iii) and in 11 indicates that *Sahjdhari* is that person who was never *Keshadhari*, thus, cannot be called as *patit*. Its analogy is that children born in the Sikh families, who were never *Keshadhari*, cannot be called as *Patit*. Any Sikh who trims beard or *Keshas* has been declared as *Patit*. It means he has no right to be a Sikh whereas a *Sahjdhari*, who is clean-shaven, is a Sikh.
- The terms "*Amritdhari Sikh*" and "*Patit*" were added in 1944.
- "*Sahjdhari*" is the latest addition, i. e. in 1959

The above discussion indicates that there are three types of Sikhs in the present Gurdwara Act: **Sikh, Amritdhari Sikh, Sehjdhari Sikh, and Patit**. This division of Sikhs not only violates the basic principle of Gurus' philosophy of equality for the humans but also for the Sikhs.

2. A Sikh in the Mahan Kosh [5] (originally written in 1927 and published in 1930)

A *Sikh* is (p 192):

- One who is the follower of Sri Guru Nanak Dev,
- One who adopts the Sikh religion of Satguru Nanak Dev,

And one who considers Sri Guru Granth Sahib as his religious Granth and ten Satgurus as same body and spirit.

A *Sehjdhari* is (p 137):

A branch of the Sikhs whose members do not adopt *khande da Amrit, kachh and kirpan*, but do not believe in any religion except that of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

And an *Amritdhari* is (p 78):

That *Singh* who had adopted *Amrit*.

Comments:

Here Bhai Kahn Singh also accepts three types of Sikhs. Here again all the three definitions lack consistency and precision:

- It is to be noted that Bhai Kahn Singh [5] used a word '**Singh**' instead of a 'person' to define an *Amritdhari*. Who is a Singh? Then he used another word '*Kharagdhari*' in the '*Amritsankar*' description (p 77). According to him a '*Khargadhari*' is the one who keeps sword, i. e., *Kirpandhari* (p 370). In other words an *Amritdhari* is also called '*Kharagdhari*' and '*Kirpandhari*'.

Contradictory statements:

- "Sikh" is one who adopts the Sikh religion of Satguru Nanak Dev.
- "*Sahjdhari*" is one who does not believe in any religion except that of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The above two statements indicate that there are two kinds of religions: one of Satguru Nanak for a Sikh and the other of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for a *Sahjdhari*.

3. A Sikh In *Rehit Maryada*, Published By The SGPC In 1945 [7]

ਜੀਐਸਕਰੀ ਜੀ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਦ ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ, ਦਸ ਗ੍ਰੰਥਾਂ ਵਿਚ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਤੱਕ), ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅੰਗ ਦਸ ਗ੍ਰੰਥਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਅਤੇ ਅਮਰਿਤ ਦੇ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਅੰਗਾਂ ਦੇ ਅਧੀਨ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹਨ।

The literal translation is as follows:

"A woman or a man, who believes in one Almighty, ten Guru Sahibans (from Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib), Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Bani and advice of ten Guru Sahibans and the Amrit of Dasmesh Ji and does not accept any other religion, is a Sikh."

Note:

- 'Believes in one Almighty' does not make this definition distinctive than others because Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others also believe in one Almighty. Thus, this is not specific characteristic of a Sikh according to the rules of defining a term.
- 'Believes in Ten Guru Sahibans' is not correct according to the Gurbani because in Gurbani it says believe in the Sabd not in Gurus.
- 'Believes in advice of ten Guru Sahibans' is also not correct because only the advice of Guru Nanak and other five Gurus was declared authentic by Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh and that has been incorporated in the AGGS.
- The word '*nischa*' that means 'belief' or 'faith' is usually interpreted by many *Amritdharis* as 'obligatory' to be a Sikh. The word 'belief' or 'faith' cannot be interpreted as 'obligatory' or 'imperative' under any circumstances. It may be necessary to add here that 'belief' and 'faith' are often used interchangeably but 'belief' may or may not imply certitude in the

believer whereas 'faith' always does even when there is no evidence or proof, consequently, the 'faith becomes 'blind faith'. Nevertheless, Guru Nanak rejects 'blind faith' and advises to research, analyse, and evaluate before accepting any statement or philosophy.

4. A Sikh In The Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (DGPC) Constitution

“A Sikh means a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only and keeps unshorn hair and have no other religion.”

Inconsistency: Is “Sikh religion” different than that of “believing and following the teaching of Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only”? One of these two phrases is redundant.

In this definition ‘who professes the Sikh religion’ is most accurate wording but it should qualify the religion. Therefore, it should have been as: *“A Sikh means a person who professes the Sikh religion based on the Gurbani incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently he/she does not practice any other religion.”*

In this definition there is no mention of *Amrit* as mentioned in the SGPC’s *Rehit Maryada*. Consequently, a Sikh, who wears a *Kirpan* (dagger) can be charged for carrying a weapon and he/she cannot defend himself/herself for wearing it as a religious symbol because this definition will not support his/her case in the court.

Under these circumstances the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* suggests that since many Sikh scholars and theologians acclaim Sikhism as a universal religion, in fact it is, then it is necessary that the definition of a Sikh should have universal adaptability/acceptability and is based on the *Gurbani*, incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. The Aad Guru Granth Sahib is the only authentic and original source of *Gurbani* that has been reiterated as the only "GURU" of the Sikh by Guru Gobind Singh since Guru Arjan in 1604 had already declared it as Guru:

Granth As Guru

Since the *Sabd* is the Guru, therefore, the Granth, in which the *Sabd* of Gurus was incorporated, was equated to Guru (Enlightener) by Guru Arjan some time before the compilation of Granth in 1604 CE as is indicated in his following stanza:

ਪੌਲਿ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ* ਕਾ ਭਾਉ ॥ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਪਿਰੰ ਬਨਿ ਭਖਿ ਭਖਿ ॥ ਆਗੇ ॥ AGGS, M 5, P 1226 [1].
"The Granth (Gurbani) is equivalent to the Enlightener. (From which) the noble people discuss (sing) the attributes of the Almighty and deliberate on the wisdom (philosophy) of the Almighty in the congregation."*

*According to Bhai Kahn Singh [5] “*Parmesar* means *Parm* + *Ishwar*. *Parm* means great and *Ishwar* has many meanings: *Shiv*, *Swami*, *God*, and also a particular teacher (Guru) of *Jogis* who teaches the philosophy of *Gorakh*. In Jap # 5 Guru has also been equated to *Ishwar*, *Gorakh*, *Brahma*, *Parbati*. Therefore, it is very clear that the word *Parmesar* used here is equivalent to the Guru (Enlightener).

It means, the day in 1604 the Granth was compiled it was given the status of Guru because of the fact that Sabd is Guru as described above, which has been incorporated into the Granth. Since then preaching of Gurbani was carried on from this Granth by Guru Arjan himself and by all other Gurus who succeeded to the House of Nanak. Therefore, the Granth is Guru since 1604 because of the fact that the Sabd Guru is incorporated in it. Guru Gobind Singh

reiterated this fact in 1708 when he declared that there would be no Guru in person and the lineage of Guru in person was discontinued in Sikhism permanently.

Therefore, definition of a Sikh should be coined keeping in view the teachings of the Gurus (Gurbani) that has been incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the only Guru for the Sikhs as explained above.

The *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* requests the SGPC, Amritsar with great concern to hold its amendments till a debate is held by the Sikh intelligentsia of the world at international level to define a Sikh. In this debate an open invitation should be given to the Sikhs having good knowledge of Gurbani besides being specialized in various fields, e. g. different sciences, medicine, psychology, philosophy, history, languages, sociology, political science, law, etc. However, keeping in mind the rules to define a term as explained above, my previous writings (2, 3, 4), and recently held many group discussions, the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* has coined the following definition of a Sikh to be considered in the forthcoming debate on "*Defining a Sikh*":

Suggested Definition of a Sikh

A person, who follows Sikhi (Gurmat/Sikhism) that is based on Gurbani, incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan, and Guru Gobind Singh, the Fifth and Tenth Guru in succession to the House of Nanak (Mahla), respectively, is a Sikh¹. Consequently, that person is the solely follower of Sikhism and does not practice any other religion simultaneously.

1: On *Vasaikhi* of 1699 Guru Gobind Singh initiated (baptized) some Sikhs and prescribed 5Ks {*Kesh* (turban to cover them), *Kanga* (comb), *Kachha* (shorts), *Kirpan* (small dagger), and *Kara* (steel bracelet)} for them and to follow the code of conduct now published by the SGPC [7]. This is based on the information found in the old literature that was not written by any Sikh Guru. They are called as *Amritdhari Sikhs*. Now there are many Sikhs, who are wearing only a few Ks.

BASES OF ABOVE SUGGESTED DEFINITION

The above-suggested definition is entirely based on Gurbani incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. However, the superscript (1) on 'Sikh' covers characteristics of *Amritdhari Sikh* found in the old Sikh literature outside of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. The words '*Sikh*', '*Sikhi*', and '*Gurbani*', used in the above definition (taken from the Aad Guru Granth Sahib) are explained as follows to show that how concise and precise is the definition of a Sikh as coined above.

***Sikhi* (Sikhism)**

A Punjabi word *Sikhi* has been anglicised to Sikhism in modern writings on the Sikhs and their religion. Let us examine what is *Sikhi*?

***Sikhi* (Sikhism) is the Guru's philosophy:**

isiKl¹ isiKAir² gr vlwir³] AGGS, M 1, P. 465.

"*Sikhi*¹ (*Sikhism*) is the teaching² of Guru's philosophy³."

Now a question arises **who is the 'Guru'** in the above stanza? Guru Nanak has made it clear in the following stanza that the Sabd is the Guru:

sbdigrllsriq Din c] ||] AGGS, M 1, P. 943.

"*Sabd is Guru, consciousness and intention toward it make one its disciple (Sikh).*"

Now there is another question **what is a Sabd?** The words Sabd and Bani are interchangeable in Gurbani. The word revealed through the Guru is a Sabd or Bani. Therefore, Bani is Gurus, Guru is Bani, and only Guru Says Bani:

vihuvihubixl inrlkwr h'iqsuj yfuAvrun kel] AGGS, M 3, P 515.

"Wondrous is the Bani of the Formless and is worth laudation as nothing equals it."

Gurbani = Guru ⇔ Bani

bixl ¹ grl² grlh' bixl ivic bixl Almquswry]

gru³ bixl kh'syku⁴ j nu⁵ minl⁶ prqik⁷ grlinsqury⁸] 5]

AGGS, M 4, P 982.

{2 & 3 gr, gru grland gir means grl according to Bhai Kahn Singh's Mahan Kosh[5]}

Who is the Guru here?

Bani (Sabd)¹ is Guru² and Guru is Bani and it contains all the elixirs of life."

What is the Bani?

"Guru³ says Bani and the servant (Sikh)^{4,5} accepts⁶ and practices⁶ it. Obviously⁷, this is the Guru who helps to get salvation⁸."

Who is the Guru that says Bani?

j nurnnkubd ygx bixl gr bixl hir nrm smwieAw]

AGGS, M 4, P 494.

"Nanak person (jann) speaks the wise words (Gunn Bani), that is Gur Bani (Guru's words) in which the Almighty is imbibed."*

Sikh

A Sikh is who, accepts and follows the teachings and modus vivendi (manner of living) taught by the Guru. And also ponders upon the teachings and contemplates on the Almighty:

gr apdjs j vhr mxxk syysKusKij l h']

AGGS, M 1, P1328.

"The teachings of Guru are the gems and jewels; one, who desires, finds it after doing research, is a Sikh."

soisKusKw sDpuh' Biel ij gr kyBixyivic Aw']

AGGS, M. 4, P 601.

"The Sikh, who accepts the teachings of the Guru, is a friend and a relative of the Guru (becomes very close to the Guru)."

gr isK mlq cl hugr cil l]

j ggrukh'sel Bl minhuj n hir hir kQw inrw l]1] rhiau]

AGGS, M 4, P 667.

"Hey Sikh of the Guru and his friend! Follow modus vivendi (way of living) taught by the Guru. Accept whatever is said by the Guru as truth since the teachings of the Guru are unique."

gr siq gr k'w j oisKw AKweysBl kyaiT hir nrmuDAw']...

apdjs gruhir hir j wplikl ivK pwp dK l ih j w']

AGGS, M 4, P 305.

“The one, who calls oneself as the Sikh of the Guru, gets up early in the morning and contemplates on the Name (the Almighty)... (That Sikh) when ponders upon the teachings (Jap) of the Guru and contemplates on the Almighty, can get rid of his sins and evil deeds.”

Conclusions

There are many different types of categories of Sikhs, e.g. Sikhs, *Amritdhari* Sikhs, *Sehjdhari* Sikhs, and *Patit* Sikhs as found in the accepted sources of Sikh literature. Besides, there are *Namdhari* Sikhs, *Nirankari* Sikhs, and followers of some *Sants* or their *Muths*.

The present study indicates that there is only one type of Sikh, who accepts and practices the *Sikhi* (*Gurmat/Gurbani*) incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Such a Sikh is altruistic in his/her nature.

An Appeal to the SGPC

Please do not define a Sikh with which you may win the control of Gurdwaras or other political motives but lose the uniqueness and universality of Sikhism.

Moreover, the SGPC is a Sikh organization to control historic Gurdwaras; therefore, it has the right to coin a definition of a Sikh. No other organization or even any Government has any right to coin a definition of a Sikh. The SGPC should protect its rights.

References

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2. Chahal, D. S. 1992. Sikh and Sikhism: Definition thereof. World Sikh News, Stockton, April 24, May 1, 8, 15 & 22.
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7. The Sikh Rehit Maryad. 1945. Published by the SGPC, Amritsar.